Beyond the colonial paradigm

Local dynamics and the shift from social separation to spatial segregation in Casablanca’s urbanism

Beqqal Najoua¹, Chaoui Omrane Mohammed²

¹ Doctorate Student, National School of Architecture, Rabat, Morocco. n.beqqal@enarabat.ac.ma
² Ph.D, Professor, National School of Architecture, Rabat, Morocco, omranechaoui@gmail.com

Abstract

Sharing with other colonial regimes the paradigm of a gap between the colonized society and colonizing one, urban policies undertaken by the French colonial administration in the Moroccan context carried a particular interest for a necessity of modernizing the local society through the urban space via a “civilizing mission”. The extensive operations of creation of new cities in Morocco generated new strategies of urban planning and management, which transformed not only the urban landscapes of cities and territories of these countries, but also went along with a deep mutation in the social structure within the cities. Willing to avoid previous mistakes in Algeria and to protect local culture from a “civilizational shock”, colonial cities built under the French protectorate by Hubert Lyautey, general resident of colonial administration, sought a the first place a separation between local population and European one. However, the subsequent approaches that followed evolved gradually towards a new order of spatial and socio-economic segregation that departed from the initial colonial policies; as the initial ethnical separation shifted to a socio-economical segregation, carried in the process, by complex socio-spatial dynamics in which the local society took part at and influenced the colonial administration and its spatial projections. By looking beyond the colonized/colonizing paradigm, this article aims, through the case of the city of Casablanca, to reassess the power of the local social dynamics. Stressing that while colonial policies initiated the shift to a modern city, social segregations that occurred after, carried by its own dynamics, need to be examined as a powerful process in reshaping our current cities.

Keywords: Spatial segregation, French colonial urbanism, local dynamics, Casablanca, Morocco.

1. Introduction

Across the colonial world of the beginning of the 20th century, urban policies undertaken under the colonial regimes generated new strategies of urban planning and management. As these politics transformed the urban landscapes of cities and territories of these countries, it also went along with a deep mutation of the local social structure within the cities. Ranging from a civilizing mission towards local society in the case of the French protectorate in Morocco, to the case of the Apartheid regime in south African cities as a spatial expression of the racial separation, there was manifestly
among these interventions a shared paradigm of an underlying a gap between colonized society and colonizing one (Jelidi, 2012: 97).

The creation of new cities in the Moroccan context carried, as numerous colonized countries, this bipolarized vision of the urban society, with a particular interest for French colonialism for a necessity of modernization and civilizing mission of the society via the urban space. These interventions went from the isolation of the medinas followed by the creation of new urban fabrics for local community called “indigenous neighborhood” by the urbanist Henri Prost, to the launching of large-scale housing projects for low-income population by Michel Ecochard, head of the town planning of the French Protectorate. After independence, inhabitant’s appropriation evolved into a new order of spatial and socio-economic segregation that is different from traditional urban mixity in the medina. In one hand, low income populations as well as indigenous occupying the medina and mass housing neighborhood, and on the other hand the middle and upper class population investing the new cities, that became later cores of extended metropoles.

However, the current socio-spatial structure of urban society is often seen as a product of colonial policies, where the social mutations are often considered as a direct result of those policies, often sideling the power of the local dynamics of the colonized society, which continues nowadays beyond the colonial situation, to shape our current cities. This stems from the fact that a majority of the researches that took place in the field of architectural historiography in the postcolonial era, dwelled on what we can call a “colonized-colonizing paradigm”, often tinted with a colonial domination, that overshadowed the reality and the complexity of the cities, as stated by many historiography researchers in the last decade (Cohen, 2006: 354).

However, this recent renewal of the exploration of the colonial situation in this field, called to acknowledge this complexity, stressing to take into account the local dynamics that stayed for a long time out of the frame of the historiographical analysis of the evolution of our cities. Thus, as J.L. Cohen underlined, it is essential in order to fully grasp the architectural and urban fact in the “colonial situation”, to avoid the “illusion of an overpowering state whose state whose policies would shape the entire society...colonies are not places of confrontation just between the colonizing state and the local subjects. Political, technical and legislative space is much more complex”.¹

Hence, by assessing the particularities of French colonial experience in the Moroccan context through the case of the city of Casablanca, this paper aims to look beyond the colonized colonizing paradigm. The local social dynamics along with the colonial policies and their interaction with the socio-economic mutations in the context of the protectorate needs to be examined as a powerful process in reshaping our current cities, for a better understanding of the current situation.

2. Protectorate versus apartheid, and the segregation as a process

In his essay “Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco” Janet Abou-Loughod, states a controversial assumption of an orchestrated class separation, projecting to the Moroccan context the concept of “Apartheid” initially used to qualify the ideological position of colonialism in south African context, which explicitly built an urban separation based on races. While we can link both the south-african apartheid and the protectorate in Morocco to the same colonial paradigm, fundamental differences exist regarding urban configurations and management, as that of the social representation of local society by settlers, or regarding urban management and control of population, as there was no explicit restrictions on access and installation of Moroccans in the European city have been established. This representation was in the French colonial policies in Morocco based on an ideology of “protectorate”, seeking to protect local culture as a mean to sustain the colonial presence (Cohen and Eleb, 1998), prevails the assumption of a totalitarian control of the colonial power over the population in the case of the Moroccan context.

Moreover, qualifying the colonial experience, J.L Cohen and M. Eleb, considered that researches related to modern Casablanca are often biased by a gap between the historical, anthropological, and social studies, and tend to fall either in glorifying the colonial experience or negatively analyzing it by opposing political and administrative actions to spontaneous organizations of local population. Stressing that urban history is less made by firm decisions than by a permanent tension between public policies and private land speculators. (Cohen and Eleb, 1998:13)

The idea of a colonial urban power controlling the city will continue to be depreciated by its own supporters, as did with JL Cohen, who will later warn about the misuse of the “laboratory” term, stressing how its extensive use lead to obscuring the reality of a complex process (Cohen, 2006: 355)

---


3 Moroccan elite has even been encouraged to invest in new cities “excepté une période de deux ans durant laquelle un dahir a été établi en 1941, régulant les opérations de vente des terrains en ville nouvelle aux non français. ce dahir a été abrogé par la suite... L’élite est accueillie à bras ouverts, alors qu’une grande frange de la population est laissée en marge parce qu’elle n’a pas les moyens financiers d’accéder à la ville nouvelle.” Jelidi, Charlotte, (2012).


5 "Some methodological precautions must also be taken, the first consist in taking care to avoid abusing the metaphor of laboratory, something to which I myself have sometimes succumbed. Often fruitful, this metaphor discerns in projects
Hence, the reality of the creation of the cities, and of the “separation” or “segregation” within cities, as stated by many historiography researchers, is more complex to be a mere confrontation between the colonial power and the local society as it is not only an expression of public policies, as it is linked to the social structure of the colonized society, as well as to private dynamics of the local society\(^6\) (Cohen and Eleb.1998 ; Rabinow, 1995; Jelidi, 2012).

Thus the social effects of these policies, while drawing decisive political vision and “the future pattern of Moroccan towns and cities” (Gaetano and Pasquali, 1985), should be seen as the result of a combination of objective constraints of a capitalist mode of production and the formulation of a social project (Rachik, 1995).

3. The spatial project and the Social project

Morocco benefited as one of the last French colony, from the feedback of previous colonial experiences in other colonies. The local culture was a subject of and study for politicians and urbanists and architects of the protectorate, whom expressed their sensibility regarding Moroccan urbanism and architecture, by understanding the local context through the anthropological researches on local vernacular architecture, in order to adapt the colonial interventions to meet the indigenous society’s needs.

This posture was an important component in settling the French colonial “Musée social”, which guided colonial policies by 1912, when the General Resident Hubert Lyautey, explicitly expressed his conviction to protect the Moroccan culture from a “civilizational shock”, and willing to establish a pacific protectorate. The colonial project, which was for Lyautey both a spatial and social project\(^7\), had to establish, as Paul Rabinow stated, a new social order, respecting the local culture, yet deeply motivated by a need to control populations through spatial grouping, following security and hygienist considerations. This translated spatially and socially to an ambiguous relation-separation between the indigenous medina and the colonial city.

Accordingly, the terminology describing the city while offering an interesting tool for the analysis, should be consider carefully, as the binary space in official colonial discourses could not reflect the undertaken in the colonies an experimental moment whose results only find their sense if exported again... but this figure of speech can also obscure the reality of the process» .

\(^6\) il est tout à fait fondamental par ailleurs d’échapper à ce que j’appellerais l’illusion du tout-État. Les colonies ne sont jamais le lieu d’une confrontation unique entre l’État colonisateur et les sujets locaux. L’espace politique, technique, réglementaire est bien plus complexe » .


\(^7\) “ j’ose dire que dans toute ma carrière coloniale , la conception qui a toujours commandé mes actions a été la conception sociale ”, cité par Esperandieu « Lyautey et le protectorat » Rachik, Abderrahmane, (1995).
reality of a heterogeneous society. Relying on an “official” terminology used by the colonial power at particular phases of the colonial era contributed to feed the racial and secular perception of colonial cities by many scholars, veiling the fact that the society components were more heterogeneous even inside European and Moroccan groups, with plural cultures and socioeconomic differences. (Florin, 2010; Jelidi, 2012; Arrif : 1993). Moreover, the perception of urban society by the protectorate does not support a static vision as the terminology used has itself evolved through the colonial presence. (Florin, 2010).

In fact, the duality “European city” and “Indigenous city” in the official terminology between 1920 and 1925, stated the separation between the two spatial entities, that went along with a museification of the traditional medina, and dominated the early colonial urban philosophy (Rachik, 1995:26). Nevertheless, this "European / indigenous" terminological duality will be replaced after 1925 by a duality between "new city" versus "old city" 8.

On the other hand, the Moroccan social structure is another factor infrequently investigated by scholars, as Moroccan elite played a consistent role in establishing an alliance with colonial administration that associated it to the protectorate, allowing a complex relationship between French colonization to Moroccan society (Rabinow, 1995). Some of the examples of this local power is reported in the work of Jelidi Charlotte 9, through the case of Fes; where it is interesting to see how as soon as colonial policies were established, socio-economic factors were shaping the settlement of the population over the ethnical ones. This shift occurred earlier in the city of Casablanca, which evolution illustrates clearly the layered and complex nature of segregation shaping the current post-colonial landscape cities.

4. Casablanca : from social separation to spatial segregation

Casablanca carries a special place among the others cities developed during the colonial period. known as a small coastal commercial crossing point, and a 18th century resuscitated small medina, the city became the economic capital of the colonial Morocco, draining most of the commercial traffic of the country. This situation brought at the beginning of the colonial establishment rapidly a massive rural migration entitling Casablanca as the first Moroccan city to host shantytowns, and witnessing a spectacular urban growth challenging colonial urban planning, as well as social tensions leading to the first riots against the settlers for independence.

8 Especially after the colonial urban planning was criticized during the international congress of in 1931, (see Jelidi, Charlotte, 2012)
a. A neo-medina invested by Moroccan elite: The “habous city”:

By 1912, the medina of Casablanca was home to a socio-economically mixed Moroccan population composed by Muslims and Jews settling in the Mellah quarter at the south-west of the medina until 1947-48. The problems of Moroccan dwelling became urgent facing the migration of rural population. (fig.1)

Fig.1. The Medina of Casablanca, (Cohen Jean-Louis & Monique Eleb, 1998)

Prost launched in 1914 the first housing operation for the indigenous population: the city Habous, calling on the architect Albert Laprade, to build a "new medina" south of the medina of Casablanca, that settled over 10 hectares (24.7 acres) on land donated by the Habous outside the perimeter of the development plan. It consisted of 700 houses inspired by traditional Moroccan architecture, and hosted a palace for the Sultan, and as an extension, Derb sultan for the servants, which was completed by Edmond Brion and Cadet. (fig. 2 and fig. 3)
Laprade, educated in the “romantic” vision of the Beaux arts (Gaetano and Pasquali, 1985), undertook a detailed work of inventorying historical and artistic characteristics of the medinas and the vernacular architecture, in order to understand and to reframe the essence of the local way of...
life. He organized the urban and spatial structure “responding to the social system and the life of the native population”, “linking architecture to landscape, interiors to exteriors, as well as aesthetics” (Gaetano and Pasquali, 1985). A special attention was given to traditional materials and technics evolving local constructors, that shows a cultural approach seeking to grasp and recreate the essence of social characteristics as well as the local architecture while linking it to the modern comfort, by featuring roadways and sanitarian facilities in the hygienist vision.

Conceived at the beginning for middle class Moroccans, “Derb el habous” was soon inhabited by Moroccan elites who left the ancient medina, which began to densify within this frame time.

b. Building the modern colonial new city: 1920-1946 the bipolarized city and the beginning of the segregation:

In 1919, the urbanist and architect Henri Prost, mandated by Lyautey, drew the first masterplan for a growing city, implementing a regulatory measures for land use rather than an urban model (Dahir du 16 avril 1914) (Cohen and Eleb, 1998 : 75). (fig. 4)

Fig. 4. Henri Prost’s Masterplan for Casablanca, 1917 (Cohen and Eleb, 1998)

Casablanca’s Masterplan structure intended three levels: firstly: regulating and readdressing the current urban situation by implementing a new road system, secondly, by defining a new land use
rules, and thirdly, by defining four zones: the city center, displaying large avenues and city’s facilities. This composition intended to reflect the modern colonial city, composed by courtyard plots, the indigenous city, the industrial zones, and the residential area hosting European upper class villas at the south-west, next to the recreational and marina area.

The European city center located close to the medina condemned the possibility of its extension outside the its walls, and the “Place de France” became the friction point between the two entities in the context of an extension project of the new city over a portion of the Mellah quarter, as Prost hoped that the neo medina of Habous will soon replace the original medina. (fig. 5)

Fig. 5. The Place de France and the Mellah, after destruction of the medina’s Wall. (Cohen & Eleb, 1998)

By 1929, while the city center was built progressively, numerous low-cost housing in plotting and industrial cities were realized around. But by the end of 40ies, Prost’s masterplan became quickly obsolete, mostly because of the speculation freezing large plots around the city, despite the efforts made further by masterplan planned by Alexandre Courtois for the extension of the city to address this situation.

By the end of 20th, Casablanca was qualified as a “mushroom city”, as it seemed to escape planned colonial urbanism, rather ruled by private interests. More shantytowns, for which the social composition of these shantytowns, were described as heterogeneous\(^{10}\), emerged despite controlling efforts forbidding their settlement inside the planned areas, first by the Dahir of 1931 and then by improving shantytowns, as “Ben M’sik” first in 1932. These operations were later followed by others led by the “Office Chérifien de l’Habitat indigène” created in 1940, that realized the

\(^{10}\) Description of Doctor Georges Béros, distingue composed of three groups muslims, jewish and european, each with rich and poor, which their “non hygienic “conditions were the same disregarding the categories. (Cohen, 1998, p.222)
“industrial quarter Cosuma” as a model workers’ city located in the extension of the neo-medina, and the operation of “cité Ain Chok” located far in the south of the city (Cohen and Eleb, 1998, 228). In 1946, in parallel, the administration, realized the “cité jardin” at the quartier “Bourgogne”, as the largest operation for European settlers. (fig. 6)

![Ain Chok city, 1952 (Cohen and Eleb, 1998)](image)

Soon, the emerging city was no longer articulated by a duality “european” versus “indigenous”, but rather divided into three entities that became quickly spatially distinct: the new city welcoming the European population, the Habous neo medina, that was inhabited progressively by Moroccan elites, and an area at the outskirts south to this neo-medina, for housing the poor indigenous mass. In terms of population origins, upper-class French settlers occupied the city center or the villas of “Mers Sultan” and “Anfa”, as the modest Europeans settled at the Roches Noires quarter, while poor Spanish and Italians inhabited the Maarif quarter. The Moroccan Jewish bourgeoisie occupied the “Anfa” quarter next to European upper class, as the poor Jewish population remained in the “Mellah” (Cohen and Eleb, 1998). At this point, the separation was already a complex combination between an indigenous / Europeans separation, and the beginning of a noticeable socio-economic segregation articulating plural culture to socio-economic differences.

### c. Ecochard and the shifting to a functional modern city:

After the departure of Lyautey and Prost by 1920 and until the venue of Ecochard in 1946, Casablanca was being caught up by growth and speculation, reaching 500,000 inhabitants By 1944, witnessing the proliferation of plotting in parallel to shantytowns developing in the city’s outskirts.

The socio-spatial landscape of the city shows therefore the matrix of spontaneous socio-economic segregation between different neighborhoods. Called by general resident Eirik Labonne, from 1946 until 1953, Michel Ecochard as leader of the department of urbanism, to whom Casablanca needed to become a rational industrial city in prevision of a more spectacular growth, saw in the Athena’s charter principles the ultimate toolbox to reach the objectives of functional city (Aevermate, 2010).
He sat up a modern vision of the city based on the functionality, urging necessity of controlling a disorder aggravated by the speculation, that led to a city made out of “\textit{private added parcelling}”. (fig. 7)

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig7.jpg}
\caption{Michel Ecochard’s Masterplan for Casablanca, showing the zoning (up) and the extensions (down) (Ecochard, 1955)}
\end{figure}

Ecochard will target for the first time poor population, by conceiving an urban and architectural solution for Mass housing, through massive projects \textit{“Habitat pour le plus grand nombre”}. He developed the 8x8 grid as an adapted architectural typology within a rationalized urban design, through the concept of neighborhood unit conceived as self-sufficient and self-contained urban entity with facilities (Chaouni, 2011: 62). (fig. 8)

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig8.jpg}
\caption{Michel, Ecochard, principles of organization of a Moroccan neighborhood unit, 1950 (Cohen and Eleb, 1998)}
\end{figure}
Ecochard’s methodology relied on studying closely the social and physical characteristics of the local context, along with cartographical and statistical analysis considering also the evolution of population (fig. 9). Ecochard considered then the shantytowns as a study model to develop an adapted dwelling. He and also projected it as an intermediate phase for migrant population in an evolving perspective: what was supposed to adapt to the population was also designed as to adapt and bring this population progressively to what was considered to be a more urban lifestyle (Aevermate, 2010)\(^\text{11}\), individual plots were to be progressively transformed into vertical and collective housing. (fig. 10).

---

Ecochard’s approach to urbanism, by “departing from the pre-war colonial era”, was the ground base to a more depoliticized urban design (Chaouni, 2011:62), the technocrat’s concerns prevailed the original colonial considerations during this phase qualified by Paul Rabinow as a phase of middling a modern urbanism (Rabinow, 1995), concentrating therefore to raising a secure and functional city rather than serving a political. This was transcribed also in the work of architects and urbanists operating in Morocco within the GAMMA group\(^{12}\).

In 1952, The AtBAT team designs the collective housing at “Carrières Centrales” operation, by designing two types of buildings according to the degree of urbanization of the Moroccan migrants, their religion, and their previous lifestyle, which Ecochard called “secular” habits, incorporating also evolving typologies as to bring them gradually to an urban lifestyle. However, later on, Moroccan representatives considered these adapted typologies as a new colonialism claiming their right to vertical modern building “HLM” “as the rest of the population”. (fig. 11)

![Fig. 11. Carrières Centrales neighborhood, 1951-1955, (Cohen and Eleb,1998)](image)

\(^{12}\) GAMMA GROUP, “group of Moroccan modern architects” lead by Ecochard at the time, was an official branch of CIAM in Morocco, and took part to most of the CIAM congress, particularly the X to the in which the Moroccan Mass housing experience was presented as an innovative approach to an adapted housing. For further information, see Chaouni, Aziza, (2011).
Standing against the pressure of the speculation brought by the migration phenomenon and the city growth, Ecochard faced a hostile opposition to his masterplan leading to his departure as well as Eirik Labonne in 1953. Meanwhile, many changes regarding the location of residential neighborhoods intended for the poor took place, and most of the massive dwelling operations were pushed to the outskirts of the city because of land speculators’ pressures, reinforcing the effects of the zoning.

5. The post-colonial Casablanca

After the independence, Moroccan middle and upper class invested the city center and the neighborhood left by European population, while the Moroccan administration continued to produce large operations of low-cost housing, by relocating and rehousing shantytowns at Derb Jdid, Hay Hassani. This city was the first operation at Derb Jdid in Casablanca, designed by Elie Azagury, as an amended version of Ecochard’s grid 8x8 “Trame Sanitaire Améliorée”. These operations were inhabited by mixed population, (Cohen and Eleb, 1998, 354), and were followed by other operations inside Casablanca as well as seven other Moroccan cities (Chaouni, 2011) with a total of 9000 houses. Although these urban projects designed to house social categories have improved their living conditions, and were intended to evolve to a more urban model taking into account a progressive evolution of the inhabitants’ needs, their location participated to the beginning of a spatialization of social segregation within the city. The modified zoning plans of Ecochard, approved in 1952, will remain in effect in Casablanca until 1984, thus, the regulating role of urban politics failed to fully defend and control its directives under the pressure of the speculative power. Later, the transfer of the urban regulation to the power of collectivities will.

The specific case of city of Casablanca under the colonial period assesses the complexity and the multiplicity of the factors involved in the establishing of a socio-economic segregation in the city within the colonial period and further. Nowadays, as the colonial legacy in the city of Casablanca is seen as a shared legacy, mobilizing both associations and administration toward conservative projects, the process of segregation in the city of Casablanca, needs to be considered in its complexity as a shared process as well.

6. Conclusion: the urban segregation as an “endogenous” socio-spatial process

The specific case of city of Casablanca assesses the complexity and the multiplicity of the factors involved in the establishing of a socio-economic segregation under the colonial situation an after. Shifting to an industrial and trade city, Casablanca faced new challenges leading to deep changes in the society’s composition along with a changing position of the protectorate administration towards Moroccan society.

In fact, while seeking both the control and the modernization of the society, colonial policies have drifted from a spatial separation -motivated by an aspiration to a peaceful protectorate by respecting local cultures-, to a spatial socio-economic segregation where the economic level of the population took over the ethnical origins, as new trajectories took place inside the social groups through the extension of the city. The belonging to a religion, a race, or a nation, that preexisted before the protectorate but was not as sharply expressed spatially nor separated hermetically, became therefore
intertwined by another cleavage: one of a socio-economical differentiation between the poor and rich that went beyond the initial colonial projections. This shift was actively allowed by local social dynamics that participated to establish a new power balance, and express the novel composition of the urban society. Spatially, that translated into the replacement of the traditional mixity by a spatial projection ruled by the administrative presence and the production’s systems.

Hence, reductive reading of segregation as a colonizing / colonized relation, veils the complexity of the process of segregation in colonized countries and its process from a separation between nationalities to a segregation of the urban society based on socioeconomic spatiality (Chouiki, 1997: 86), and the concept of Apartheid as an intention of colonial ruling, seems inaccurate in the case of French protectorate in Morocco.

Therefore, the modernization of the society and the establishment of a segregated urban society should be seen as a social process that went along with the spatial mutation, rather than being a product of this one. Consequently, the current effects are linked equally to the ideology of the French protectorate as well as the pre-existing structure of society, and the efforts for both during the phase of middling a modern urbanism (Rabinow, 1995), which played an important role in the Moroccan context.

Thus, the new urban landscape became a product of this change as well as a factor of his fixation (Escallier, 1981:151), that we could qualify as an endogenous process that is self-generated and self-maintained by the dynamics of the city through the process of the establishment of a new urban society. These interactions of the local powers with the urban politics and the entire socio-economic mutations constitute an interesting field of investigation in the studying of numerous Moroccan modern cities under the colonial and post-colonial situation, and could provide a better understand of the extent of the influence of local dynamics in the segregation process, and how it continues to affect the current urban landscapes of Moroccan cities.

References

Arrif, A. *La ville coloniale au Maroc : objet de savoirs, objet de projets. Sciences sociales, Architecture, Urbanisme*, (1993); Communication au séminaire « Architectures exportées : transferts, expérimentations, métissages », Laboratoire Urbama (Université de Tours), équipe LAA (EA Paris-la Villette), laboratoire Ladrhaus (l'EA Versailles), Tours, « Architectures exportées : transferts, expérimentations, métissages ».


Florin, B. (2010). Expériences urbaines et architecturales et discours afférents dans le domaine de l’habitat social au Maroc sous le Protectorat (1912-1956), Les Cahiers d’EMAM [Online], 20, Online since 10 February 2012, connection on 24 October 2018. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/emam/70


